‘Culture is a meritocracy’

Culture is a meritocracy: Why creative workers' attitudes may reinforce social inequality

Mark Taylor (Sheffield)[1] and Dave O'Brien (Goldsmiths)[2]

Abstract

This article investigates attitudes towards inequality among creative workers. In the UK, there is considerable public interest in access to creative jobs, and a concern that these jobs are limited to those from privileged backgrounds. Moreover, both inequalities in cultural work and the attitudes of cultural workers have been important areas of study for existing research. Based on a web survey (N=2487), this article investigates attitudes among creative workers, and finds that the characteristics that are most consistently associated with success by creative workers are hard work and ambition, rather than structural factors, such privileged social origins, gender or ethnicity. Using principal components analysis and regression, we show that there are three main factors related to getting ahead, associated with reproduction, meritocracy, and education, and we show that those in the most privileged positions – broadly, the highest-paid white non-disabled men – are those most likely to deny an account of success in the creative industries. We conclude that the attitudes held by creative workers, and who holds which attitudes, make it unlikely that access to the sector and trajectories of individual progression within the sector will change.

Highlights

- Analysis of unique web survey of cultural workers and their attitudes to getting ahead
- The attributes most commonly described as "essential" to getting ahead are hard work and ambition
- Most positive attitudes towards getting ahead in the sector came from those in privileged positions
- Demonstrates the challenges for those seeking to raise awareness of inequality in the cultural sector

Keywords

cultural workers, principal components analysis, inequality, attitudes, meritocracy

Acknowledgments

The survey research was collected via *The Guardian* and coordinated by Create London. Provisional versions of this research have been presented at BSA and ICCPR conferences, and at Goldsmiths and Sheffield Hallam universities; we thank participants at these for their helpful comments.

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

1: Introduction

[1] m.r.taylor@sheffield.ac.uk
[2] d.obrien@gold.ac.uk

Entry and access to cultural and creative jobs is currently a major issue of interest in social and traditional media discussions. The shape of the cultural workforce, along with the attendant impact on what is produced and who consumes that production, underpins high profile global discussions of cultural sectors including film (#oscarssowhite) and video games (#gamergate). The subject has also been a core area of concern for academic research, developing from cultural studies (e.g. Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010) to include a range of sociological perspectives (Conor *et al* 2015, O'Brien *et al* 2016). American (e.g. Mayer 2011, Koppman 2015), French (Dubois 2016), and British (Friedman *et al* 2016) case studies have suggested significant barriers to entry and success in cultural jobs. These barriers track other forms of social stratification, mapping onto - but not exactly mirroring - social divisions of wealth, status, gender and race.

However, there has been a lower level of research interest in the attitudes held by those working in the sector. This is a curious omission given the centrality of attitudinal perspectives accorded to one of the foundational theories of the creative economy, Richard Florida's 'creative class' (Florida 2002). There is a tradition of qualitative engagement with ethnographic and interview data that has revealed a variety of orientations towards 'getting ahead' in cultural work (see Oakley and O'Brien 2015 for a review), including theorising the sense of guilt or failure when confronted with the structural inequalities endemic to the creative sector (McRobbie 2016). In this context, the current paper focuses on a specific aspect of these structures, the idea of meritocracy within cultural jobs.

The paper begins by reviewing the literature on cultural work and inequalities in cultural and creative jobs, before moving to outline broader research on attitudes to social inequality. The paper then demonstrates, based on a survey of those working in cultural and creative jobs (N=2487), a widespread acceptance of crucial inequalities across cultural work that are subsumed by the belief that hard work and talent are the motivators of success. Most notably this belief in 'meritocracy', as opposed to grounding the issues affecting the sector in the reproduction of social inequality, is most strongly held by those in the survey who reported the highest levels of earnings. This suggests an important barrier to social change in cultural and creative jobs, whereby those most successful are least likely to hold attitudes that might form the basis to resist the operation of social structural forces associated with the exclusion of women, non-white individuals, and working class origin communities (O'Brien *et al* 2016).

1.1: Studying cultural and creative work

There are longstanding academic debates, research programmes and disciplinary traditions associated with the study of cultural and creative work. Initially of interest to cultural studies, the area has generated a wealth of research in economics, geography and sociology, alongside core insights in business, management and organisation studies. We can think through this literature as having three phases and three distinct forms, associated with a range of differing positions on the virtues, or otherwise, of working in a cultural or creative job. The first consists of those writers and policy makers who have attempted to theorise what cultural and creative labour *is* and where the specific boundaries of creative occupations can be drawn. Second there are the debates around inequalities in cultural and creative work, with some (e.g. Florida 2002) arguing for cultural jobs to be seen as a blueprint or model for the rest of economy and society, while others are much more critical of working life in cultural and creative industries. This debate is summarised in the following section as it sets the contours for attitudes towards inequality. Finally there is more recent literature

aiming to theorise creative work's relationship to broader social trends, including urban policy (Evans 2000), gender (Luckman 2015, Conor *et al* 2015), management practice (Harney 2015) and cultural theory itself (exemplified by a recent collections by Banks *et al* 2013).

Understanding what, exactly constitutes CCIs has been a longstanding problem. The original advocates for taking cultural production seriously as part of the economy (e.g. McRobbie 2002) were directly concerned with highlighting both the transformative and in some cases emancipatory nature of cultural production and its potential for economic and, in the case of cities and local jurisdictions, political impact (see O'Brien 2014 for a detailed discussion of this history). However, the eventual establishment of cultural and creative industries in the form recognised across British and Commonwealth nations (as well as exported to south east Asian jurisdictions via the British Council, Prince 2010), broadened out the set of occupations to include a focus on the production and control of intellectual property, bringing computer services and IT into an expanded set of 'creative', as opposed to merely 'cultural' industries. Indeed, in the American context the most notable advocate of the impact of creative work on economy and society, Richard Florida, took the category to include science, law and large sections of financial services, in contrast to the more traditional 'copyright' industries discussed in US literature (e.g. Ross 2007).

More recently critiques of the intellectual property basis of creative industries (e.g. Hesmondhalgh 2013) and the role of software and computer services in inflating the economic importance of the sector in the UK (Campbell 2013) paved the way for a redefinition of the sector and the current settlement. This conception of cultural and creative industries has repositioned the act of 'creativity' at the centre of the occupational boundary drawing exercise to delimit the creative and cultural industries from other parts of the economy. Creativity is: 'A role within the creative process that brings cognitive skills to bear to bring about a differentiation to yield either novel, or significantly enhanced products whose final form is not fully specified in advance' (NESTA, 2013, p. 24) and those occupations with the required intensity of creativity yield the current definition of a cultural and creative job, whereby 'in essence a creative industry is defined as being one which employs a significant proportion of creative people, as identified by those being employed in a creative occupation. The debates, however, continue (O'Brien et al 2016). For the purposes of this paper, and to speak to the context of the DCMS/UK model of creative and cultural occupations, what follows uses nine overarching sectors of the economy (IT, Software and Computer Services; Advertising and Marketing; Music, performing and visual arts; Product, graphic, and fashion design; Publishing; Film, TV, video, radio, and photography; Crafts; Architecture; Museums, Galleries and Libraries), corresponding to 30 individual occupations.

Although the debate over the exact boundaries of cultural and creative jobs is still ongoing, the recent expansion of discussions over the impact of cultural and creative labour on a range of intellectual and social sectors has been crucial to reinforcing the perception of cultural and creative work as worth of specific study (see Oakley and O'Connor 2015 for a summary). In addition to the research base, there has been, in both the UK and USA, extensive media and public discussion of these issues. From #oscarssowhite and questions of ethnic diversity and representation in cultural industries in America, through to recent comments by high profile cultural practitioners in the UK as to the class basis of cultural work, there is considerable interest in the issue of inequality in access to cultural work, the implications of this access for representations and then the subsequent relationship to cultural consumption (Oakley and O'Brien 2016).

1.2: What do we know about inequality in cultural and creative occupations?

It is clear, therefore, from the existing research base that there is a mismatch between narratives of an open, meritocratic, set of occupations and the structural barriers to those who are not blessed with affluence, or those who are not the 'default' white, middle class male. The former point, that cultural occupations might represent a 'meritocracy' is vital to understanding the significance of attitudinal data within any understanding of the sector.

The research explored in the previous section, for example McRobbie's (2016) recent work, identifies the tension between the structures of cultural labour markets and the narratives associated with work within those subsectors of the economy. Cultural work is narrated as open to everyone. In the UK, the national setting for the attitudinal data discussed in this paper, there has been cross-government support for this narrative (O'Brien 2014). The possibility that all citizens might be part of creative work is a celebratory discourse, albeit one that can easily be reframed to justify prevailing social inequalities under the assumption that the 'creatives' are straightforwardly entitled to the rewards befitting their ability. This narrative is, of course, intertwined with meritocratic justifications for a range of other social inequalities (Littler 2013).

The meritocratic narrative of creativity within British public and policy discourses is not unique. Indeed, the best know statement of the idea of creative and cultural work as a meritocratic system suffused with workers displaying open, tolerant and meritocratic attitudes, is in the work of Richard Florida on the 'creative class' (2002). Concentrating on the urban policy implications of a new cadre of cultural and creative workers, Florida argued cities must mirror the attitudes of openness, tolerance and meritocracy that characterizes creative workers. The discursive construction of these workers, who Florida celebrates for both their economic potential and their demographic, consumption, and attitudinal characteristics, is an excellent example of the ideal type creative workers who are, supposedly, characteristic of cultural occupations. However, as recent research has demonstrated, these workers are subject to specific structural advantages that are only tenuously linked to their creative capacity and owe much to broader, socially patterned, forms of inequality.

The previous section detailed the range of critical academic engagements with cultural work, which have focused on issues such as working conditions (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010; McRobbie, 2002), institutional barriers to access (Conor et al 2015) and the limits of cultural occupations' contribution to the creative economy (Oakley 2014). Specific work on employment patterns in cultural work has a long history, but there has been a recent flurry of new research based on specific occupations (e.g. Koppman 2015, Friedman *et al* 2016) or new national datasets (O'Brien et al 2016). Koppman's (2015) work in the USA has shown how shared cultural tastes correlated with middle class backgrounds are highly influential in hiring practices within CCIs, concurring with Rivera (2015) that hiring is, in effect, a form of cultural matching rather than a meritocratic exercise. Here the idea of meritocracy and talent, as opposed to having the right cultural tastes or background, obscures the role of gender (Gill 2002), class (Friedman et al 2016) and ethnicity (Saha 2015) in shaping who gets in and gets on in cultural work. The role of these social structural factors have been demonstrated in a recent review of the literature on inequalities of cultural production by O'Brien and Oakley (2016), who pointed to the consensus in the literature on the continued importance of institutional barriers for those who were not white, affluent, men. Indeed, the question of barriers to entry into cultural

jobs has been a major part of recent work, including barriers of class (Randle et al, 2014, Eikhof and Warhurst 2012; Friedman et al 2016), of education (e.g. Banks & Oakley, 2015; Scharff, 2015; Bull, 2014; Allen, 2014) and of social networks (Nelligan, 2015).

The barriers manifest themselves in the uneven shape of the cultural workforce, with specific issues in particular occupations. A recent analysis of 2014 Labour Force Survey (LFS) data in the UK (O'Brien et al 2016) found those from affluent backgrounds are hugely overrepresented in many cultural occupations, along with uneven representation of women and those from minority ethnic origins. For example, 43% of people working in publishing, 28% in music and 26% in design come from an affluent background, compared with 14% of the population in the LFS. Fewer than 7% of employees in large parts of the Creative and Cultural Industries are members of black or minority ethnic groups. Just 4% of those working in design, and 5% of people in crafts across the UK are non-white. Excluding the IT sector, only 6.5% of workers in Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) are non-white. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (2012) show that 14% of the population in England and Wales and more than 40% of London's population are black and minority ethnic (BAME). The most ethnically diverse CCI is IT, software and computing: around 15% of employees are from BAME backgrounds. However, just 15% of employees in this occupation are women. Women make up 54% of publishing, but just 24% of film, TV, radio and photography employees and 30% of architecture employees are female.

Moreover, the LFS data indicated clear pay gaps related to gender and social class origin. There is a significant gender and class 'ceiling', where women in cultural and creative industries earn, on average, an estimated £112 per week (around £5,800 a year) less than otherwise similar men doing the same jobs. In many parts of the industry of the CCIs, workers from the most privileged backgrounds earned more than the rest of the CCI workforce, even when they were doing the same jobs. In IT the earnings gap is estimated at £117 per week based on the social background of the worker, and in publishing it is about £191 per week.

The uneven shape of the cultural workforce in the UK can be accounted for through the barriers identified by existing research surveyed earlier in this article. A useful illustration of the relationship between critical research, studies of LFS data, and the operations of specific occupations comes from Friedman et al (2016), using the example of acting as a key cultural occupation. They found actors were disproportionately male and disproportionately drawn from privileged class backgrounds, with over half (51% of actors in the LFS) from 'middle-class' professional or managerial backgrounds, as opposed to 29% of the population surveyed by LFS. By contrast, Friedman et al's (2016) analysis suggested that only 16% of actors in the LFS have parents who worked in semi-routine and routine employment, compared with 33% of all LFS respondents.

In addition, those from less privileged backgrounds who did make it into acting faced lower pay rates than those from more affluent starting points. This analysis suggested difficulties entering education, accessing agents (crucial intermediaries within the labour market for actors), getting parts and navigating the assumptions associated with typecasting. All of these barriers pointed to the operation of differing cultural, economic and social network resources, again a variation of hiring as cultural matching, which owed more to the social structure of cultural production in the UK than any individual creative capacity.

This latter point raises two questions. On the one hand there is a question of how this social structure is experienced, something of which the existing literature surveyed above has offered a detailed overview. Second, and less well developed in existing work, is the question of how these structures are perpetuated within the attitudes and assumptions of those occupied in cultural labour. There is this still a need to understand how barriers to getting in and getting on operate. Here understanding broader attitudes towards inequality, as a route to understanding how these attitudes function within creative work, is essential.

1.3: What do we know about attitudes to inequality?

Crucially, it does not follow that inequalities in CCIs mean that people working in or around CCIs believe that the sector is unequal: for example, people in the sector may erroneously believe that people from different class backgrounds are paid the same. In addition, people may acknowledge that inequalities exist, but they may believe that inequalities are just and fair: they may believe that success is overwhelmingly determined by talent, and that the most talented people happen to disproportionately come from privileged backgrounds.

Both within and beyond the CCIs, people's beliefs about inequality take a number of different dimensions, including both knowledge *of* inequality and normative beliefs *about* inequality. McCall and Chin (2013) investigate what people believe the ratios between the highest- and lowest-paid workers in organisations are and what they should be; they find that not only do people believe that high and low pay should be closer together, they also significantly underestimate actual discrepancies, believing that the income distribution is more equal than it actually is. Relatedly, Loveless and Whitefield (2011) investigate more generally questions of "social inequality", asking whether levels of social inequality where people live are too high, about right, or too low; Isaksson and Lindskog (2009) investigate whether people believe that government should intervene in order to change the situation.

Here, we focus on *perceived inequality of opportunity* (Brunori, 2015). This dimension is measured by presenting respondents with a battery of items, and asking how important each of those is in terms of getting ahead. Respondents who report that coming from a wealthy family, knowing the right people, and having been born a man are all essential to getting ahead might be considered to perceive inequality of opportunity as high, while a respondent who considers those items to be not at all important, while holding ambition and hard work as essential, might be considered to perceive inequality of opportunity as low. It therefore can be considered to incorporate both knowledge and normative beliefs: it is impossible to determine exactly how much people's success can be attributed to their hard work, but the literature generally finds that people who are better-informed about workplace conditions perceive inequality of opportunity as higher. Batteries of this form have been used in large-scale social surveys including the General Social Survey in the USA, and the International Social Survey Programme[3].

Studies using these batteries of questions tend to find that people's beliefs about inequality are that processes err on the side of fairness, with overall higher scores on items like "hard work" than "coming from a wealthy family". However, this varies internationally, with people in richer countries

[3] It has also been shown that different measurements of attitudes to inequality are related: those who believe inequality to be greater are also more skeptical of equality of opportunity (McCall and Chin, 2013)

generally believing that processes are fairer than do people in poorer countries (Brunori, 2015). In addition, men generally perceive greater inequality, as do older people (Hanson and Wells-Dang, 2005), while the relationship between perception of inequality and education varies cross-nationally (Hanson and Wells-Dang, 2005; Reynolds and Xian, 2014).

However, while these relationships vary cross-nationally, the correlations between attitudes themselves are relatively stable. While some studies investigate responses to battery items individually, others investigate the relationships between items. Both Hanson and Wells-Dang (2009) and Reynolds and Xian (2014) use factor analysis on the batteries of questions in order to either construct or validate scales; in this way, they investigate whether people who rate "being a man" as important rate "talent" as being less important. In both papers, there are fairly coherent scales constitutive of effort, hard work, and similar; these are described as either "meritocracy" or "human capital". Higher scores on these scales correspond to more egalitarian beliefs about how society works. Both papers also find two scales that can be considered to be in tension with this, "ascriptive" or "structural", and "discrimination" or "friends and family". The first of these consists of race, religion, and gender; the latter, of coming from a wealthy family and knowing the right people. While high scores on each of these scales both correspond to less egalitarian beliefs about how society works, they are also distinct from each other; it is plausible to believe that discrimination takes place because of who you know rather than more fundamental demographic issues. Finally, Hanson and Wells-Dang find a fourth factor, with the heaviest loadings coming from one's own education and the education of one's parents. This can be seen as being relatively orthogonal to questions of fairness; it is possible to construct narratives around education being used as an arbitrary barrier to entry, and around it being a way to suitably train people for roles.

In addition, while these dimensions differ in their perceived inequality of opportunity – those with higher scores on meritocracy are likely to perceive inequality of opportunity as lower, while those with higher scores on discrimination are likely to perceive it as higher – the dimensions are not at odds with each other. As they are constructed via principal components analysis, the dimensions are relatively independent of one another. In addition, it is not incoherent to simultaneously hold that it's important to be hard-working and talented *and* to be a white man from a wealthy family: someone holding such a position might recognise structural discrimination, while believing that privileged people can still only get ahead if they are also talented and hard-working. Similarly, some people score low on all these dimensions; this might reflect that they believe that who gets ahead is more-or-less random, or indeed that the things that are important in terms of getting ahead weren't mentioned in the battery of questions.

In terms of cultural and creative industries, we might expect two findings from any research on attitudes to inequality. On the one hand the research by Florida (2002) suggests attitudes of openness, tolerance and a commitment to meritocracy are prevalent across the creative sector. This would be the basis for a hypothesis of a strong set of support for meritocratic beliefs about the sector, including the importance of talent and hard work for success in the labour market. On the other hand, the research surveyed earlier in this paper suggests cultural occupations are subject to significant exclusions that are well known to participants (e.g. Friedman *et al* 2016 on the acting profession). Here we would expect faith in meritocracy to be weaker for those groups of non-white, non-male, less affluent origin individuals and communities that are under-represented in cultural work and experience exclusions from cultural labour markets. However, as our data will

demonstrate, the picture is complex, showing a cluster of occupations whose practitioners have a strong belief in the meritocratic nature of cultural work, albeit one that is strongly socially stratified. The socially stratified nature of these attitudes suggests the potential for transformation of the social structures underpinning the inequalities identified within cultural and creative occupations (Oakley and O'Brien 2015) is limited by the beliefs of the cultural workforce.

2: Data and methods

The data were collected over the period 21 September-20 October, via an online survey hosted at the Guardian[4] under the headline 'Do you work in the arts, culture, or creative industries? Take our survey on diversity in the sector.' Links to the survey were heavily promoted on social media, including tweets from organisations such as Equity, the Musicians' Union, the Arts Council England, various different Guardian accounts, and several others.

Because of this recruitment method, this is a nonrepresentative sample and should be treated in that way. While results may be indicative of a population of people working in the CCIs, they also may not; conclusions are limited to those participants who opted in to the survey. However, as the introduction has indicated, these issues are supported by existing, more representative, survey material.

In total, there were 2540 responses to the survey, of which an estimated 53 were duplicates, leaving a total of 2487 cases. The survey involved a total of 7 sections: on people's roles in the cultural and creative industries; the amount of time they've spent working in their sector; their sources of income and outgoings; their experiences of working without pay; their attitudes towards what's important in getting ahead in their sector; their social contacts; relevant demographic questions (including questions on social origin); and various free-text fields.

Here, we focus on the questions about getting ahead. We use the well-validated battery of questions described above about perceived inequality of opportunity. In most surveys, the question is asked 'Please tick one box for each of these to show how important you think it is for getting ahead in life…', and presented with a series of items. In this case, the options remain the same, but the original stimulus is changed to 'Looking at your creative occupation as a whole, how important do you think each of these is in getting ahead?', focusing the questions on the respondent's sector specifically rather than life in general.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, we report descriptive statistics of each of the items within this bank of questions, and for relevant indicator variables. Second, we describe principal components analysis on this same bank of questions, in order to identify whether these items can be reduced to a smaller number of latent variables. Third, we use regression models in order to estimate the relationships between relevant indicator variables and factors. Analysis was conducted in Stata 14.1, and graphics were prepared in R using the ggplot2 package.

3: Results

3.1: Descriptive statistics

[4] http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/sep/21/panic-survey-diversity-arts-culture-creative-industries

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for relevant indicator variables, and Figure 1 shows the distributions of responses to each item in the bank of questions about getting ahead, on a scale from "not at all important" to "essential".

Table 1 about here

Figure 1 about here

Table 1 shows that, while the survey was nominally targeted at people working across the CCIs, the distribution of sector sizes is very different from the national picture painted by the Labour Force Survey (O'Brien et al 2016, table 1), most conspicuously by the underrepresentation of workers in IT (2% compared with 29%), and the overrepresentation of workers in performance and music (29% compared with 9%) and in museums, galleries and libraries (15% compared with 3%).

In terms of the other indicator variables, a relatively high percentage of respondents (22%) reported at least one disability; in most cases, this related to mental health. Most respondents had at least an undergraduate degree (82%, compared with 64% across the CCIs). A large majority of respondents (69%) were women, while the only CCIs that are predominantly women in the LFS are women are museums, galleries and libraries, and publishing. Respondents were generally poorly paid: 28% received less than £5k pa from their practice, with only 23% receiving more than £30k pa. Crucially, only 24% of respondents classified both parents as being in anything other than professional or managerial jobs, indicating that the sample overwhelmingly consists of people from what might be classified as "middle-class backgrounds"; this is an even smaller fraction than in the CCIs as a whole (O'Brien et al 2016, table 2). 88% of the sample identified themselves as being white, a slightly smaller fraction than the CCIs in general and a similar figure to that of the overall UK population; however, this looks unusually white given that a huge 45% of respondents were based in London, which was overall 60% white at the 2011 census. Finally, the mean age in the sample is just under 37, and relatively few respondents are new to their sector, with just 13% having worked in it for less than a year.

The sample is therefore clearly not representative of the CCIs in the UK in a number of ways. The particular sectors of the CCIs that it consists of are different, with more actors and fewer programmers; it has far more women; it is more London-centric; it is more highly-educated; it is younger. Given recruitment was opt-in, participants are those who recognise themselves as working in the cultural and creative industries, and who find out about a survey hosted at the Guardian, likely through unions and relevant professional bodies. Indeed, these are the sectors who receive more of the celebratory discourse around the cultural and creative industries, in spite of representing a relatively small part of their workforce and an even smaller part of contribution to GDP for which they are supposedly lauded. In this way, it is closer to representing an ideal type image of the CCIs: probably young, highly-educated women in London whose parents had middle class jobs.

Figure 1 shows that the highest-rated attribute overall for getting ahead is "hard work", rated "essential" by 62% of the sample, and followed closely behind by "ambition", rated "essential" by 54% of the sample. At the opposite extreme is "your religion", rated "not important at all" by 67% of the sample, followed by "your ethnicity" at 35% (and another 25% "not very important"). In general, figure 1 indicates that attributes associated with a meritocratic account of the CCIs are more highly-regarded than attributes associated with an account consistent with reproduction, although there is

one exception to this: 43% of the sample responded that it's essential to know the right people, with another 32% responding that it's very important. These results are broadly similar to those in other studies, indicating that respondents in the creative industries broadly hold similar attitudes about inequality of opportunity in their sectors as do people living in rich countries do about the societies they live in in general.

3.2: Principal components analysis

As with other studies using the same or similar questions, we use principal components factor analysis and conduct a varimax rotation, with a minimum eigenvector value of 1. This retains 3 factors, with loadings shown in figure 2.

Figure 2 about here

This analysis results in three distinctive factors, which we have labelled "Reproduction", "Meritocracy", and "Education". Each of the variables intuitively associated with a reproduction account – gender, ethnicity, knowing the right people, coming from a wealthy family, class, and religion – has a weighting on the "reproduction" factor of over 0.3; the same is true for ambition, hard work, and talent on the "meritocracy" factor. A third factor is dominated by "your education", although "having well-educated parents" is also prominent.

The crucial difference between these results and those in the other papers described above is the fact that non-meritocratic variables are all in a single factor, while in other work these variables can be distinguished into "friends and family" and "discrimination". In other studies, it is consistent to hold that being well-connected is crucial for getting ahead while factors associated with more explicit discrimination, such as racism, are not salient; instead, here, they are coherent in a single "reproduction" factor. The other factors, "meritocracy" and "education", are consistent with what's seen elsewhere.

The distributions of the factors among individuals within the sample, and the relationships between them, are shown in figure 3.

Figure 3 about here.

Both the reproduction and education factors are approximately normally distributed, while the meritocracy factor is negatively skewed. This can be accounted for by the distributions of the items that have the highest loadings onto this factor: very few respondents reported that one's religion, gender, and ethnicity were essential for getting ahead, for example, so a respondent who did respond in that way has an extremely low score on that factor; by contrast, a respondent who said that each of these things was not at all important is much closer to the modal value. The weak correlations between the factors following the rotation - positive between education and meritocracy, and negative between education and reproduction – also make intuitive and plausible sense.

3.3 Regression results

We predicted each of the factors using linear regressions (with robust standard errors) with the same independent variables in each case, the only difference being the dependent variable.

We first address the model predicting the "education" factor: briefly, the only things associated with large coefficients[5] for this factor are respondents' own education levels, and the sector in which they work. People working in each of publishing and architecture hold particularly high scores on this factor: this is unsurprising, as in the case of architecture holding higher-level qualifications in the discipline is necessary in order to practice, while in publishing a large fraction of workers have postgraduate qualifications in publishing. Meanwhile, people working in IT are particularly unlikely to think education is important to getting ahead; this may reflect some narratives within the sector that credentialism can be harmful, and that qualifications do not add a great deal.

Other than those variables, though, no other is strongly associated with this factor; this is also reflected in the particularly low R-squared for this model.

The model predicting the "meritocracy" factor varies by more of the independent variables, although several still have relatively small associations. Younger people have higher meritocracy scores, although the difference between an 18-year old and a 25-year old are smaller than those between a 48-year old and a 55-year old, as shown by the quadratic term. Women score higher on this scale than do men. Sector-wise, people in each of crafts and design have higher scores than the average, while people working in museums and galleries score lowest of all on this scale. Crucially, people's scores on the meritocracy factor increase as does their income, with very large differences between the highest and lowest parts of the scale. However, differences according to parents' occupations are smaller; people from traditional professional backgrounds score higher than others, but not wildly, and the differences between other parental backgrounds are marginal. Regional variation is fairly low. This model has a scarcely higher R-squared than that for education.

The model predicting the "reproduction" factor reflects that of the "meritocracy" factor in some ways, but not all. Women score higher on this factor, as they do on meritocracy, and there is even less regional variation. The differences in income and parents' occupation reflect those for "meritocracy"; however, while the differences for people from traditional professional backgrounds are roughly as negative as they were positive, the differences by one's income are even larger. However, while on the "meritocracy" factor there were only small differences by disability and ethnicity, on "reproduction" people with disabilities score moderately higher than people without disabilities, and white people score drastically lower than non-white people. Finally, occupational differences also vary: here, the groups with highest scores on "reproduction" are those working in performance and music, and in visual arts.

Comparing the models, we can see that the reproduction model has the highest R-square of the three, and that where there are relationships between predictor variables and the outcome variables, the coefficients are also largest for the reproduction variable. In some ways, this reflects the larger variance within this category: almost everyone thinks that hard work and talent are important in terms of getting ahead, with the crucial differences in the "meritocracy" scale being between the highly-paid and everyone else. By contrast, mean scores on the items that make up the "reproduction" scale are lower, and differences on these scores differ more consistently across groups of interest: while the crucial difference on the "meritocracy" scale was about pay, the

[5] While these tables include stars for significance testing, this is misleading as the sample was not randomly selected from a population. Because of this, we focus mainly on effect sizes, highlighting differences between groups, rather than measures of statistical significance.

differences between the high- and low-paid on reproduction are twice the size of those on meritocracy, with additional differences on ethnicity and disability. Surprisingly, women score higher than men on both of these scales.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is the relatively small set of coefficients associated with respondents' backgrounds; the only significant differences between those people whose parents had non-managerial or professional jobs are those whose parents were traditional professionals. This is surprising for two reasons. The first is that one might expect that the magnitude of the differences in incomes between people of different class backgrounds, discussed above, would translate into differences between these groups in their recognition of how one becomes successful. The second is the moderate numbers of people reporting believing that "coming from a wealthy family" and "your class" are important to getting ahead. While these numbers are dwarfed by those for "knowing the right people" and "your talent", it seems here that the belief that class background is moderately important does not map on to people from different class backgrounds having different attitudes towards what's important in getting ahead.

4: Discussion

There is a straightforward positive reading of these results: people working in the CCIs in the UK think that the sector is more or less fair, with hard work being the most important thing for getting ahead, and the least important things being religion, gender, ethnicity and class. However, this account is complicated by asking who, exactly, thinks that these are the most and least important things respectively. The people who are least likely to say that the process of getting ahead reflects more general social reproduction are highly-paid non-disabled white men.

We might answer the question "what do cultural workers think about inequality?" by saying "the same as everyone else". These results are not in major tension with research that uses similar batteries of questions in other contexts. Compared with this research, there is a handful of surprises – for example, people's attitudes towards the importance of knowing the right people and coming from a wealthy family load onto the same single factor as your ethnicity and your class, and women score higher on both the meritocracy and reproduction factors – but there is nothing here that indicates that the attitudes of people working in the CCIs are radically different from those working in other sectors, or in none at all. This may imply that awareness of issues of access to the CCIs have not got through to people who work in them, or at least to any greater extent than the general population. This might be considered surprising, given how high-profile the debate around issues of access were at the time of data collection. Alternatively, it may be that the issue was high-profile but people actually working in the sector rejected accounts in which access to the sector was unequal; this may have felt necessary in order for people to justify their own success, preferring to feel that their success in the sector was due to their own individual traits rather than more general structural issues. This may be particularly relevant given that the people whose account is most in the direction of fairness are the people who are most handsomely rewarded by the sector. Indeed, this sits in the context in which there are two different dimensions through which cultural workers express their attitudes towards inequality – reproduction and meritocracy – and it is not just the case that the better-rewarded are more likely to ascribe success to talent, but that they are even more likely to deny the relationship between success and structural factors.

However, one surprising finding is the relatively weak relationship between attitudes towards inequality and class origin. Even if we account for the fact that self-reported descriptions of what kinds of jobs people's parents had is likely to weaken any true relationships, the differences are substantially smaller than for those variables relating to people's present conditions. This is surprising, as one might expect that those whose transition into working in the CCIs has been relatively smooth, via elite (expensive) institutions and the ability to work for free for long periods without hardship, would be less likely to see structural barriers, whereas those people who have directly experienced them would be more likely to do so. This is, at least, the narrative one expects given public discussion of inequality in access to the sector.

Given these results, there is no reason to imagine that the situation is likely to change. Access to the CCIs is still constrained by structural factors; these structural factors are predominantly recognised by those in the sector in precarious positions, whereas those in stronger positions are more likely to generate a meritocratic narrative of how people end up in their positions. It is difficult to see where the impetus for the situation to change would come from.

5: Conclusion

This paper has explored attitudes prevailing within cultural and creative occupations, with a focus on inequality. This focus aimed to respond both to media interest in inequality and cultural jobs, as well as extending current academic understandings of cultural and creative work. By focusing on the attitudes of cultural workers towards inequality, notably by demonstrating those surveyed all support a some version of a meritocratic account of getting in and getting on in the sector, the paper has important implications for future research and engagement activity with cultural and creative occupations. In the first instance, as the discussion has indicated, the attitudes towards inequality in the sample are in keeping with broader social attitudes, suggesting cultural and creative labour, at least in attitudinal terms is neither more or less well disposed to social critique than other occupations. At the same time, this finding casts doubt on research that suggests these occupations exhibit *more* meritocratic attitudes than the rest of society. Thus both critical and 'creative class' claims for the uniqueness of cultural work should be treated more cautiously.

Second, and connecting to the origins of the study of cultural and creative work, the findings and discussion query the transformative potential of the cultural sector, given that it displays a belief in the meritocratic nature of cultural jobs and that belief is stronger in those with higher incomes. These attitudes are at odds with research on both the shape of the labour market for cultural work (O'Brien and Oakley 2015) and the composition of the cultural workforce (O'Brien *at al* 2016).

Indeed, the evidence that the younger and the higher earning, respondents have higher 'meritocracy' scores means this political project may be further in doubt. Concurrently these higher scores may add weight to those authors (e.g. McRobbie 2016) seeking to account for cultural and creative labour through forms of individualisation associated with theories of neo-liberalism. More research work on connecting attitudes in a range of nations beyond the UK to broader theories of cultural work may prove fruitful here.

The positive reading, which is associated with the idea that people think the sector in which they work is fair and meritocratic is most troubling, given the research that has revelled the structural and overwhelming inequalities within cultural work. As a result, we should expect more media attention

to address questions of access, representation and consumption but there is little indication that these controversies will challenge the faith individual cultural workers have in the role that hard work and talent plays in getting in and getting on.

Tables and figures:

Table 1: descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	N	Variable	Mean	N
Disability status	0.22	2487	**Parent's occupation**		
Ethnicity = white	0.88	2090	Senior manager	0.19	2486
Education = degree or greater	0.82	2487	Trad professional	0.18	2486
Age (sd)	36.97 (11.05)	2468	Middle/jnr mgr	0.09	2486
Gender			Modern prof	0.29	2486
Male	0.31	2486	NS-SEC 3-7	0.24	2486
Female	0.69	2486	**Time in the industry**		
Other	0.01	2486	>6 months	0.08	2486
Sector			6 months-1 year	0.05	2486
Advertising/marketing	0.06	2486	1-2 years	0.09	2486
Architecture	0.01	2486	2-5 years	0.19	2486
Craft	0.02	2486	5-10 years	0.21	2486
Design	0.06	2486	More than 10 years	0.38	2486
Film/TV/Video/Radio/Photography	0.08	2486	**Region**		
IT	0.02	2486	East of England	0.05	2347
Museums/Galleries/Libraries	0.15	2486	West Midlands	0.04	2347
NA/Other	0.1	2486	East Midlands	0.03	2347
Performance/Music	0.29	2486	North East	0.03	2347
Publishing	0.07	2486	North West	0.07	2347
Visual Arts	0.12	2486	Yorkshire	0.05	2347
Income			South East	0.11	2347
>5k	0.28	2487	London	0.45	2347
5-10k	0.1	2487	South West	0.06	2347
10-20k	0.16	2487	Wales	0.04	2347
20-30k	0.24	2487	Northern Ireland	0.01	2347
30-50k	0.17	2487	Scotland	0.07	2347
>50k	0.06	2487			

Figure 1: descriptive statistics

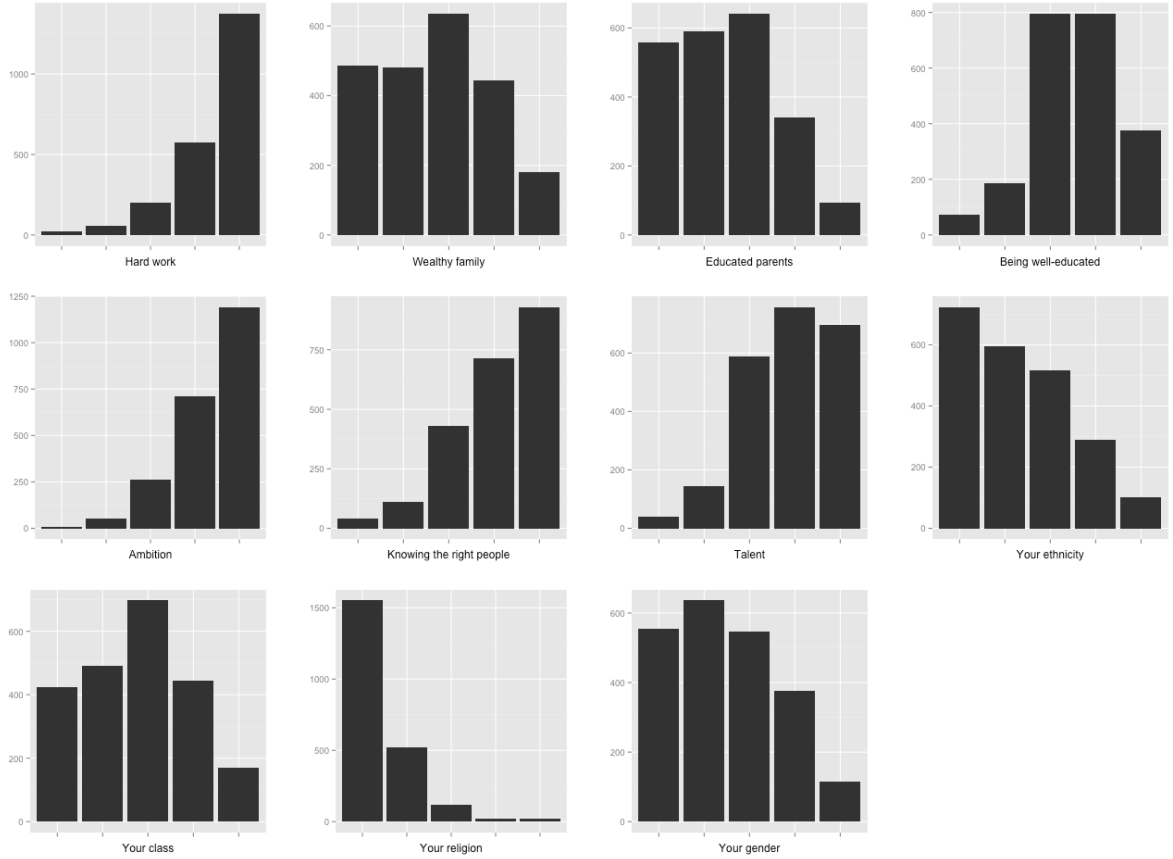

Figure 2: principal components analysis factor loadings

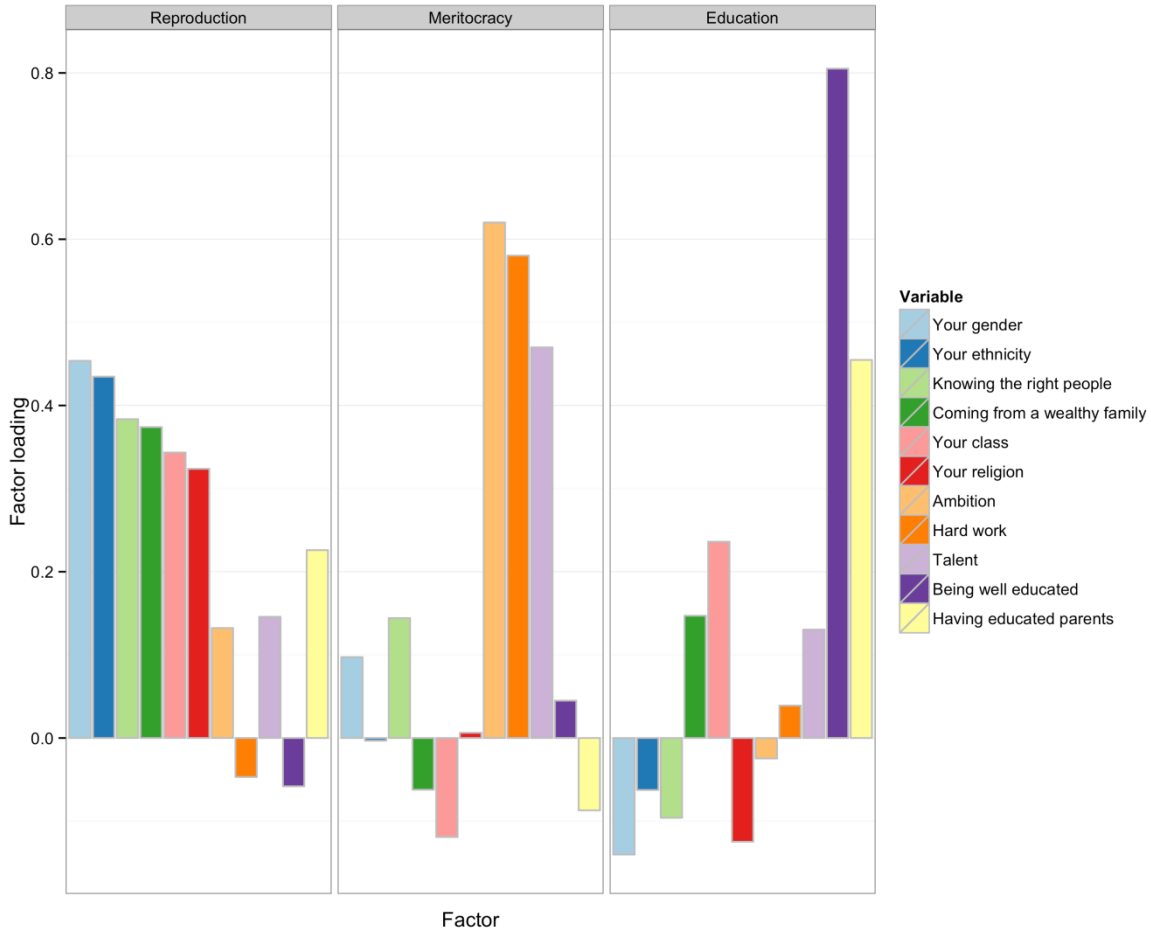

Figure 3: distributions of factors and relationships between factors

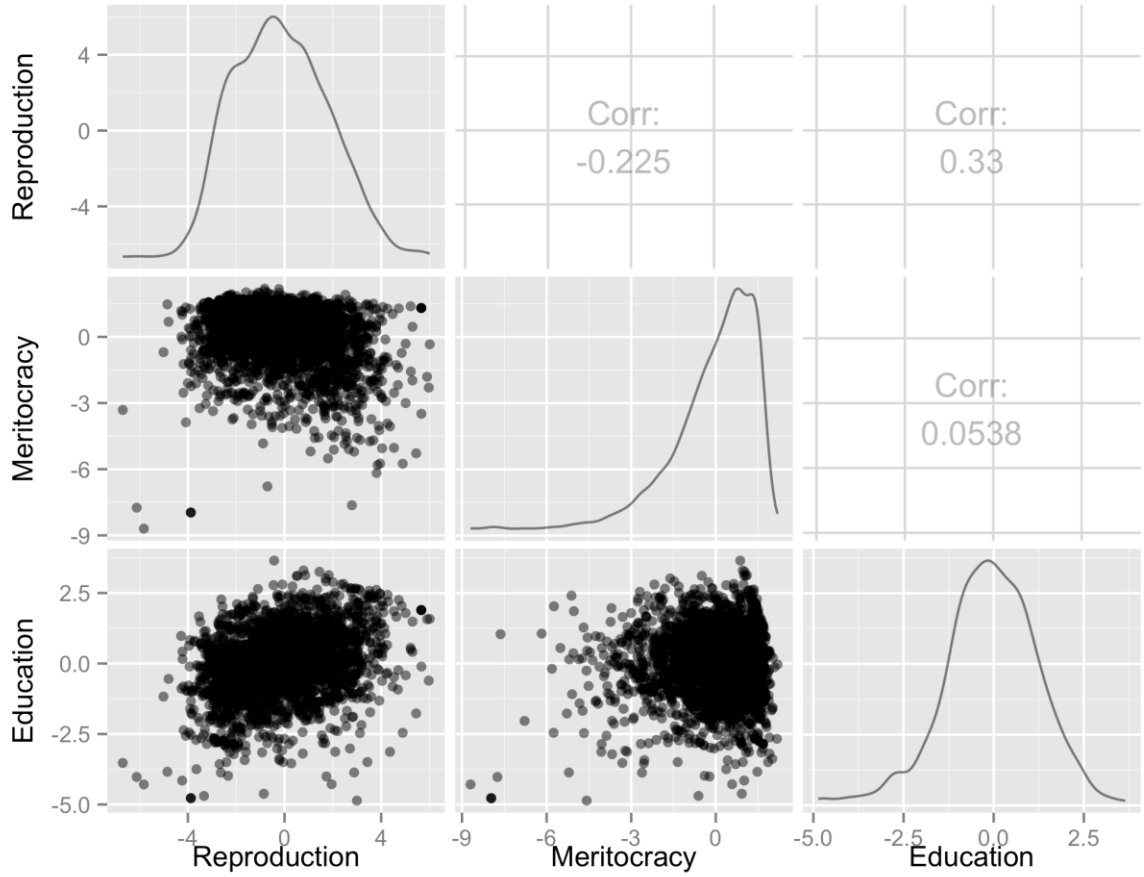

Table 2: regression results

	Reproduction	Meritocracy	Education
Disabled	0.404***	-0.0721	0.0785
Ethnicity = white	-1.076***	0.21	-0.0368
Education = degree+	0.0908	-0.114	0.192**
Age	0.0536	-0.0528*	0.0124
Age squared	-0.000635	0.000489*	-0.00014
Gender (base = male)			
Female	0.239**	0.272***	0.103
Other	1.661	-0.307	0.331
Sector (base = advertising/marketing			
Architecture	-0.185	0.0319	0.417*
Crafts	-0.815*	0.526*	-0.477*
Deisgn	-0.246	0.334*	-0.311*
Film/TV/video/radio/photography	0.329	0.201	-0.267
IT	0.162	-0.298	-0.671**
Museums, galleries, libraries	-0.0947	-0.439**	0.138
NA/other	0.31	-0.0286	-0.0288
Peformance/music	0.522**	0.098	-0.203

Publishing	0.277	-0.243	0.277*
Visual arts	0.407*	0.075	-0.0855
Income (base >5k)			
5-10k	-0.133	0.137	0.184
10-20k	-0.415**	0.161	0.139
20-30k	-0.795***	0.187	0.157
30-50k	-1.027***	0.384***	0.122
50k+	-1.423***	0.681***	0.142
Parents' occupation (base = NS-SEC 3-7)			
Senior mgr	-0.24	0.0544	-0.118
Trad prof	-0.253*	0.262*	0.0278
Middle/jnr mgr	-0.195	0.0766	-0.116
Modern prof	-0.129	0.137	0.12
Time in sector (base >6mo)			
6mo-1yr	0.0864	-0.0689	0.0954
1-2 years	-0.0536	0.0145	0.0281
2-5 years	0.0421	0.0484	0.0916
5-10 years	-0.0316	-0.0394	0.0853
10 years+	-0.00314	0.0131	0.104
Region (base: East of England)			
West Midlands	-0.247	0.429*	0.0157
East Midlands	0.0742	0.0712	0.0879
North East	-0.252	0.103	-0.227
North West	0.00628	0.0215	-0.0296
Yorkshire	-0.0943	0.0614	-0.0541
South East	-0.0653	-0.0769	0.0479
London	0.352	-0.156	-0.0233
South West	0.122	0.0861	-0.036
Wales	-0.16	0.154	0.0327
Northern Ireland	-0.642	0.493*	-0.325
Scotland	-0.0824	0.0537	0.0254
Constant	-0.305	0.696	-0.599
N	1985	1985	1985
R squared	0.1715	0.0648	0.0516

References

Allen, K. (2014). 'What do you need to make it as a woman in this industry? Balls!' Work placements, gender and the cultural industries. In D. Ashton & C. Noonan (Eds.), Cultural work and higher education (pp. 232–253). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Banks, M., & Oakley, K. (2015). Class, UK art workers and the myth of mobility. In R. Maxwell (Ed.), The Routledge companion to labor and media (pp. 170–179). New York, NY: Routledge.

Banks, M., Gill, R., & Taylor, S. (Eds.). (2013). Theorizing cultural work: Labour, continuity and change in the cultural and creative industries London:Routledge.

Brunori, P. (2015) "The perception of inequality of opportunity in Europe," Working Papers 364, ECINEQ, Society for the Study of Economic Inequality.

Bull, A. (2014). Reproducing class? Classical music education and inequality. Retrieved from www.discoversociety.org/2014/11/04/reproducing-class-classical-music-education-and-inequality/, 25/07/2016

Campbell, P. (2014). Imaginary success? – the contentious ascendance of creativity. European Planning Studies, 22(5), 995–1009.

Conor, B., Gill, R., & Taylor, S. (2015). Gender and creative labour. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Dubois, V. (2015) Culture as a Vocation London: Routledge

Eikhof, D., & Warhurst, C. (2012). The promised land? Why social inequalities are systemic in the creative industries. Employee Relations, 35(5), 495–508.

Florida, R. (2002). The rise of the creative class. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Friedman, S., O'Brien, D., & Laurison, D. (2016). "Like skydiving without a parachute": How class origin shapes occupational trajectories in British acting. Sociology. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0038038516629917

Gill, R. (2002). Cool, creative and egalitarian?: Exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe. Information, Communication and Society, 5(1), 70–89

Hanson, S. L. and Wells-Dang, G. (2009) Gender and attitudes about opportunity in Eastern and Western Europe. *European Sociological Review* 22 (1): 17-33.

Harney, S. (2012) 'Unfinished Business: Labour, Management, and the creative Industries', in Hayward, M. (ed.) Cultural Studies and Finance Capitalism, London: Routledge.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013) The Cultural Industries, London: Sage

Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2010). Creative labour. New York, NY: Routledge.

Isaksson, A.-S. and Lindskog, A. (2009) Preferences for redistribution – a country comparison of fairness judgments. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 72: 884-902.

Koppman, S. (2015). Different like me – why cultural omnivores get creative jobs. Administrative Science Quarterly. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0001839215616840

Loveless, M. and Whitefield, S. (2011) Being unequal and seeing inequality: explaining the political significance of social inequality in new market democracies. *European Journal of Political Research* 50: 239-266.

Luckman S. (2015). Craft and the Creative Economy. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mayer, V. (2011) Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

McCall, L. and Chin, F. (2013*) Does knowledge of inequality affect beliefs about inequality?* Working paper presented at Midwest Political Science Association.

McRobbie, A. (2002). Clubs to companies. Cultural Studies, 16(4), 516–531.

McRobbie, A. (2015). Be creative. Cambridge: Polity Press

Nelligan, P. (2015). Walking the vocational tightrope: Narratives of aspiration, creativity and precarious labour (Unpublished PhD). University of Western Sydney

Oakley, K. (2014). 'Creativity is for people – Arts for posh people': Popular culture and the UK New Labour Government. In T. Miller (Ed.), Routledge companion to popular culture (pp. 449–458). London: Routledge.

Oakley K. and O'Connor, J. (Eds.) (2015) Routledge companion to the cultural industries (pp. 99–111). London: Routledge

O'Brien, D. (2013) Cultural Policy, London: Routledge.

O'Brien, D., & Oakley, K. (2015). Cultural value and Inequality: A critical literature review. London: AHRC.

O'Brien, D., Laurison, D., Friedman, S., and Miles, A. (2016) 'Are the Creative Industries meritocratic?' Cultural Trends 25(2) 116-131

Office for National Statistics (2012) Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011. Retrieved from http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11, 25/07/2016

Prince, R. (2010) 'Fleshing out expertise: The making of creative industries experts in the United Kingdom' Geoforum 41 875-884

Randle, K., Forson, C., & Calveley, M. (2015). Towards a Bourdeiusian analysis of the social composition of the UK film and television workforce. Work, Employment and Society, 29(4), 590–606.

Reynolds, J. and Xian, X. (2014) Perceptions of meritocracy in the land of opportunity. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 36: 121-137.

Rivera, L. (2015). Pedigree: How elite students get elite jobs. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ross, A. (2007) 'Nice Work If You Can Get It', in Lovink, G. and Rossiter, N. (eds) My Creativity Reader, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Saha, A. (2015). The marketing of race in cultural production. In K. Oakley & J. O'Connor (Eds.), Routledge companion to the cultural industries (pp. 99–111). London: Routledge.

Scharff, C. (2015). Equality and diversity in the classical music profession. London: Kings College London.